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Heaven Names in the Translations of Zhi Qian*

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It is well known that Indian Buddhist cosmology includes a rich assortment of heavenly realms, in addition to the lower realms of humans, animals, *pretas*, hell-beings, and (according to some but not all sources) *asuras*.¹ While all of the latter realms of rebirth were located within the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*), Buddhist heavens were portrayed as encompassing all three of the major divisions of the cosmos, including not only the realm of desire but also the realms of form (*rūpadhātu*) and formlessness (*arūpadhātu*).

This complex cosmological vision—featuring twenty-six heavens in the standard Pāli list, twenty-seven according to some Sarvāstivādin groups, and twenty-eight (or even more) in other sources²—was clearly not formulated all at once, but developed gradually over an extended period of time. Some of these heavens are mentioned frequently in early sources, while others appear there sporadically or not at all. As we shall see, this uneven distribution is also reflected in Chinese translations, both in the frequency of references to various heavens and in the relative degrees of consistency or inconsistency in the number of heavens assigned specific categories.

The goal of this paper is to present, first and foremost, the forms in which the names of these heavens were represented in Chinese translations produced by Zhi Qian

* The materials contained in this paper were first prepared as a handout for the members of the Six Dynasties Reading Group at Indiana University in 2001. I would like to thank the members of that group—especially Stephen R. Bokenkamp, whose reflections on some of the anomalous names in Zhi Qian's list of *rūpadhātu* heavens led to our presentation of a joint paper on this topic at the American Oriental Society meeting in Toronto (Nattier 2001 and Bokenkamp 2001)—for their very helpful feedback. In the fall of 2005 an updated version of the handout was distributed to the members of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University, where I received helpful comments from Stefano Zacchetti on antecedents to Zhi Qian's translations of the *arūpadhātu* heavens in the works of An Shigao. In the final stages of preparation I also received valuable feedback from Rupert Gethin on the treatment of the *kāmadhātu* heavens in Pāli sources, from Stefan Baums on the likely Gāndhārī antecedent of one of Zhi Qian's terms, and from John R. McRae on both English wording and the limits of interpretation of certain Chinese terms. Any errors that remain are, of course, my own.

¹ For the debate concerning the status of the *asuras* (accepted as a sixth *gati* by some but not all Indian Buddhist schools) see the copious references in Lamotte 1944-1980, vol. 1, pp. 613-616 (especially p. 613, n. 1) and vol. 4, pp. 1953-1959 (especially p. 1956, n. 1).

² Convenient charts of the heaven-names given in Pāli sources can be found in Collins, 1998, p. 298 and Gethin 1997, p. 194, and for Sanskrit (Sarvāstivādin) sources in Kloetzli 1983, pp. 33-39 and Sadakata 1997, pp. 58-59. As will be discussed below, in addition to these, other (and even longer) lists are found in certain texts translated by Zhi Qian and Lokakṣema, pointing to the likelihood that the twenty-six and twenty-seven member lists were not the only ones circulating in India.

支謙 (fl. c. 222-252). Although I have previously discussed several of these names elsewhere,³ it may be useful to give an overview of all of Zhi Qian's heaven terminology in one place. As a by-product of this approach, we will be able to observe some distinctive patterns in the treatment of these terms in Zhi Qian's work.

Extensive lists of the names of Buddhist heavens are included in four texts that are credibly attributed to Zhi Qian: the *Banniehuan jing* 般泥洹經 (T6, a non-Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*), the *Yizu jing* 義足經 (T198, a version of the *Arthavargīyasūtra*, Pāli *Atthakavagga*), the *Pusa benye jing* 菩薩本業經 (T281, a “Proto-Buddhāvataṃsaka”), and the *Da mingdu jing* 大度明經 (T225B, a “Shorter Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra” generally corresponding to the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*).⁴ The names of the first six heavens only (that is, those belonging to the *kāmadhātu*) are also listed in two other works produced by Zhi Qian: the *Zhai jing* 齋經 (T87, “Abstinence Day Sūtra,” generally corresponding to the *Visākhā-sutta* of the *Anguttaranikāya*, AN III.70) and the *Yueming pusa jing* 月明菩薩經 (T169, **Candraprabha-bodhisattva-sūtra*).⁵ In addition, the names of certain individual heavens or clusters of heavens also appear elsewhere in Zhi Qian's corpus (though unless these exhibit a noteworthy pattern of distribution or diverge in some way from the usage found in the texts mentioned above, they will not be singled out for attention here). Zhi Qian's translations, in sum, offer a rich resource for the study of the transmission of Buddhist cosmological ideas from India to China. In this paper I will therefore present an overview of the treatment of the names of Buddhist heavens in the works of Zhi Qian, together with references to earlier texts (where available) in which translations or transcriptions of the same terms appear.

Several things are noteworthy about the lists found in Zhi Qian's works: (1) They diverge, in a number of respects, from the “standard” heaven lists found in Sanskrit and Pāli sources, both in the interpretation of the names of specific heavens and in the number of heavens mentioned within certain categories; (2) where pre-existing transcriptions or translations of these names were available, Zhi Qian generally adopted them without change, but when such terms were not yet available (notably in the case of most of the heavens of the *rūpadhātu*) he appears to have coined new Chinese translations himself; and (3) the majority of these newly translated names are unexpected, diverging from their Sanskrit (or far more likely, Prakrit) prototypes in revealing ways.⁶

One caveat should be mentioned at the outset: in dealing with the Chinese names of Buddhist heavens a perennial problem is posed by the fact that the word *tian* 天 is used in Chinese as a translation both of words for “heaven” (Skt. *devaloka*, *svarga*) and of the names of those who dwell there, i.e., the gods (*deva*). Since the various categories of gods are generally referred to by the names of the realms they inhabit—for example,

³ Earlier versions of some of the materials presented here appeared in Nattier 2001, 2006, and 2007; see also Bokenkamp 2001.

⁴ For details on these texts and further bibliographic references see Nattier 2008, pp. 126-128 (for T6), p. 134 (for T198), pp. 136-137 (for T225B), and pp. 137-139 (for T281).

⁵ On these texts see Nattier 2008, p. 130 (for T87) and p. 142 (for T169).

⁶ It is assumed throughout this discussion that Zhi Qian, like his predecessors and contemporaries, was working mostly (perhaps entirely) from Indian source-texts, whether written or oral, composed in one or more Prakrit vernaculars.

“the Trāystrimśa gods” or the “Ābhāsvara gods”—this does not pose a serious obstacle to our inquiry here. Nonetheless, when translating such lists from Chinese into another language it is always essential to consider both of the possible meanings of *tian* 天 and to evaluate each case according to its context.

(1) Heavens of the *Kāmadhātu*

It has long been recognized that a group of six heavens, assigned in scholastic literature to the Realm of Desire (*kāmadhātu*), is attested already in the Pāli sūta literature.⁷ Comparable occurrences can be found as well in various *āgama* texts preserved in Chinese. Some of these heavens are quite well known and are frequently mentioned individually in the sūtra literature, while others are relatively obscure. Individual references to the Tuṣita heaven, for example (where the Buddha spent his penultimate existence), or of the Trāyastriṃśa heaven (from which the god Śakra came on a number of occasions to speak with the Buddha, and to which the Buddha ascended to preach the Dharma to his mother after her death), are easy to find in sūtra texts. Other *kāmadhātu* heavens, by contrast—for example, the Yāma and Nirmāṇarati heavens—are rarely mentioned alone, usually appearing when lists of all six *kāmadhātu* heavens are given. References to this group of six can, in any event, be found at least once in each of the four Pāli nikāyas,⁸ and parallels can easily be located in their Chinese counterparts as well.⁹

Within Zhi Qian’s corpus, as is also true of extant Indic-language sources and of Chinese translations in general, the list of six heavens is remarkably stable. Not only is the number of heavens within this group entirely consistent, but the names of the six are virtually identical (allowing for minor scribal variations) throughout his corpus as well. In the rare cases where an alternate name or nickname is given, these will be pointed out below.

With the standard Sanskrit names given for comparison (and Pāli parallels provided in parentheses for convenience), Zhi Qian’s renditions of the six names are the following:

⁷ The term *kāmadhātu* itself is quite rare in the Pāli suttas, and thus far I have not been able to locate any instance of its use there in association with the list of six heavens. Rupert Gethin wisely cautions against making too much of this, as the distinction between the spheres of human beings, the gods of the six heavens, and brahmā(s) is fairly standard in the Pāli Nikāyas, thus making it clear that the realm of the six heavens was regarded as distinctive in some way, whether or not it was labeled explicitly as belonging to a *kāmadhātu* (e-mail message dated 10 February 2009). In the four primary Nikāyas the set of three *dhātus* (*kāma*, *rūpa*, *arūpa*) is mentioned once in the *Dīghanikāya* (III.215), once in the *Majjhimanikāya* (III.63), and twice in the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (I.223–224); in addition a set of three *bhavas* (likewise referred to as *kāma*, *rūpa*, and *arūpa*) is mentioned at DN III.216, SN II.3, and AN III.444. (I am grateful to Rupert Gethin for calling my attention to these references.)

⁸ To give just a single representative example from each Nikāya, one may consult the following: DN III.259, MN II.194, SN V.410, and AN I.210. In all four of these cases (as is typical in the Pāli sūta literature), the list of six heavens is followed by a reference to the realm of Brahmā (referred to as the *brahmaloka* or the *brahmakāika* gods) as well.

⁹ Copious references to the six heavens (far too many to enumerate here) can be found in the Chinese Āgamas. Since the names of the heavens vary from translator to translator, it may be useful to provide a representative example from each of the Āgamas in order to facilitate searches by other scholars for the list as a whole or for individual heaven names in particular Āgama texts. For the *Dīrghāgama*, see T1 (1.35c5–6); for the *Mudhyamāgama*, T26 (1.458a17–24); for the *Samyuktāgama*, T99 (2.111c12–13) and T100 (2.433a23–24); and for the *Ekottarikāgama*, T125 (2.804c5–8).

| Sanskrit | Equivalent(s) in Zhi Qian's works ¹⁰ |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>Caturmahārājika</i> (P. <i>cātummahārājika</i>) | <i>si tianwang tian</i> 四天王 ¹¹ |
| 2. <i>Trāyastriṃśa</i> (P. <i>tāvātimsa</i>) | <i>daoli tian</i> 忉利天 |
| 3. <i>Yāma</i> (P. <i>yāma</i>) | <i>yan</i> 鹽 (var. 炎, 焰) <i>tian</i> 天 |
| 4. <i>Tuṣita</i> (P. <i>tusita</i>) | <i>doushu tian</i> 兜術天 |
| 5. <i>Nirmānarati</i> (P. <i>nimmānarati</i>) | <i>bujiaole tian</i> 不憍 (var. 驕) 樂天, <i>nimoluo tian</i> 尼摩羅天 |
| 6. <i>Paranirmitavaśavartin</i> (P. <i>paranimmittavasavatti</i>) | <i>huayingsheng tian</i> 化應聲天, <i>mo tian</i> 魔天 |

Of these the majority were not coined by Zhi Qian himself but were simply adopted by him from pre-existing texts. Thus the translation term *si tianwang* 四天王 “four heavenly kings” had appeared earlier in the work of Lokakṣema,¹² as had the transcribed names *daoli tian* 忉利天,¹³ *yan tian* 鹽天 (also written with the variant characters 焰 and 炎),¹⁴ and *doushu tian* 兜術天.¹⁵ Only in one text, the *Yueming pusa jing* 月明菩薩經 (T169), does Zhi Qian use a transcription for the name of the fifth heaven, and this has an

¹⁰ Since the passages in which the lists of heavens in Zhi Qian's translations are given in full in Appendix 1 below, only references to exceptional readings or omissions will be given here.

¹¹ This name occurs in several variants, of which 四王天 is restricted, in Zhi Qian's corpus, to texts that conform to Lokakṣema's transcription-oriented style (T169, 3.411b9) or are actual revisions of his work (T361, 12.291b23 and 27 and 291c6, though this text contains several occurrences of 四天王 as well). The abbreviated form 四天 (without the word 王 “king”) occurs once in a highly condensed list of the names of some of the lower heavens (T87, 1.911c22), while longer variants include 四天王天 (T281, 10.447a25) and 四天大王 (T225B, 8.485a10), though the latter clearly refers to the gods rather than the heaven itself. This name is not included in the list of heavens in T198, where the discussion begins with the Trayastrīṃśa heaven, though it does occur in isolation at a number of other points in the text (4.182a3 and 7 and again at 182c8-9 and 12).

¹² See T224, 8.429a12 and *passim*; the same translation is used in Lokakṣema's other core text, T418 (13.903a16, 912c27-28, and 914c14) as well as in several other works thought to have been produced by Lokakṣema or other members of his school (including T313, T362, T624, and T626). This is the sole heaven-name that is regularly translated, rather than transcribed, by Lokakṣema, though in one case he transcribes it as *zhaotou moluo tian* 照頭摩羅天 instead (see T280, 10.446a20).

¹³ The term occurs in both of Lokakṣema's core texts (T224, 8.430a25 and *passim* and T418, 13.913c11 and 916a16 and 23) and throughout the larger group of texts associated with Lokakṣema and his community. It also occurs several times in the work of Kang Mengxiang (T196, 4.153b10 and *passim*).

¹⁴ The term occurs twice in Lokakṣema's *Daoxing jing* (T224, 8.434c24 and again at 439c1 in the variant form 炎), though not in his *Banzhou sanmei jing* (T418), where this heaven (by any name) does not appear to be mentioned. It does occur, however, in Lokakṣema's translation of the “Proto-Buddhāvataṃsaka” (T280, 10.446a20), as well as in the version of the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha* now thought to have been produced by Lokakṣema or a member of his school (in the variant form 焰; see T362, 12.309c8, where it is explicitly referred to as the “third heaven”). The variant 炎天 also occurs in the *Akṣobhyavyūha* (T313, 11.759a10 and 11), though the text as we have it is certainly not the work of Lokakṣema, and indeed it is quite possible that the text as we have it was revised by Zhi Qian himself (see Nattier 2008, pp. 85-86).

¹⁵ This name occurs several times in the *Daoxing jing* (T224, 8.439c6 and *passim*), with two occurrences in the more extended form 兜術陀 (8.435a4 and 468b27). The latter occurrences are, however, surely the result of scribal emendation, for they violate Lokakṣema's standard transcription conventions, according to which final *-ta* is never represented as a separate syllable (see Nattier 2006, pp. 193-195). Again this name does not occur in the *Banzhou sanmei jing*, but it does appear in the *Dousha jing* (T280, 10.446a21) and in a number of other texts associated with Lokakṣema's school.

antecedent in Lokakṣema's earlier work as well.¹⁶ The same is true of the nickname "Māra's heaven" (*mo tian* 魔天) which occurs in the same work.¹⁷

It might initially seem surprising that these names first appear only in the translations of Lokakṣema, i.e., that such common terms are absent from the translations of his predecessor An Shigao 安世高 (fl. 148-170). Given his well-known focus on topics such as meditation techniques, basic Buddhist doctrines, and abhidharma, however, perhaps it is not surprising after all that discussions of the *kāmadhātu* heavens do not feature in An Shigao's work. In fact, as we shall see below, his corpus does include the names of several *rūpadhātu* and *arūpadhātu* heavens, which are precisely those that have long been correlated with certain meditative states.

Returning to Zhi Qian's own treatment of the names of the *kāmadhātu* heavens, it is important to note that his translations of the fifth and sixth heavens, the *Nirmāṇarati* and *Paranirmitavaśavartin* realms, do not appear in any other text that is certain to date from before his time. Indeed it seems likely, though this cannot be proven with certainty, that these names were coined by Zhi Qian himself.¹⁸ In his work the term *Nirmāṇarati* ("Those who delight in creation") is interpreted as "Heaven of Joy without Arrogance" (*bujaiole tian* 不憍 [var. 驕] 樂天),¹⁹ while the *Paranirmitavaśavartin* heaven ("Masters of the creations of others") is understood as meaning "Heaven of Transforming Speech" (*huayingsheng tian* 化應聲天).²⁰ These highly innovative renditions—it is difficult not to describe them as errors—are typical of what we find elsewhere in Zhi Qian's work.

Allowing for minor scribal variants (and the divergent renditions of the fifth and sixth heavens found in T169), the names given above are used consistently throughout Zhi Qian's corpus. Moreover, there are no exceptions to the rule that this group consists of six heavens, a fact which surely reflects the early standardization of the list of *kāmadhātu* heavens in Indian sources. As we shall see, however, the same cannot be said of the heavens belonging to the *rūpadhātu*, for here Zhi Qian's work points to the existence not of a single consensus list, but rather of a number of divergent traditions.

¹⁶ The *Yueming pusa jing*, in which transcriptions abound, is one of the most "Lokakṣema-like" works in Zhi Qian's corpus. This is the sole text in Zhi Qian's corpus in which the *Nirmāṇarati* heaven appears as *nimoluo* 尼摩羅, presumably abbreviated (as Zhi Qian often does) from Lokakṣema's slightly longer transcription *nimoluoti* 尼摩羅提 (e.g., T224, 8.439c11).

¹⁷ For *mo tian* 魔天 as a name for the *Paranirmitavaśavartin* heaven see for example T224, 8.460c17.

¹⁸ For another archaic text that shares this terminology and a brief discussion of its status see Appendix 2.

¹⁹ Zhi Qian has interpreted *nirmāṇa* "manifestation, magical creation" as *nir-māna* "without pride" (cf. BHSD 302a, s.v. *nirmāṇatā*); cf. Nattier 2007a, p. 369.

²⁰ That is, Zhi Qian's translation indicates that he read the term as (a presumably Prakrit form of) **pariṇāmitavācāvartin*, interpreting its main components as *pariṇāmita* "transformed, changed (into)" (cf. BHSD 323, s.v. *pariṇāmayati*) and *vācā* "speech." A misreading of *-vaśa-* as *-vācā-* would not be unexpected in Gāndhārī, where *vācā* would be expected to become *vāyā*, vowel-length (in the Kharoṣṭhī script) is generally unmarked, and the *akṣaras śa* and *ya* are virtually indistinguishable (I would like to thank Stefan Baums for his very helpful input on this portion of the word).

(2) Heavens of the *Rūpadhātu*

As is well known, the heavens assigned to the “Realm of Form” (*rūpadhātu*) came to be associated at a certain point with the four states of meditative concentration known as *dhyānas*,²¹ and for the sake of convenience I will follow this scheme in organizing the discussion of the *rūpadhātu* heavens here. As we shall see, in Zhi Qian’s work we will find divergences from the standard Sanskrit and Pāli lists in both the number and the names of the heavens in all four of these categories.

a. First *dhyāna*

According to a wide range of Buddhist sources the first *dhyāna* corresponds to the world of the god Brahmā (*brahmaloka*). According to both Pāli and Sanskrit scholastic works, this world is subdivided into three distinct realms: from lowest to highest, they are the heaven of Brahmā’s retinue (Skt. *brahmakāyika* or *brahmapāriṣadya*, Pāli *brahmapārisajja*), of Brahmā’s ministers (Skt. and Pāli *brahmapurohita*), and of Great Brahmā (Skt./Pāli *mahābrahma*), respectively.²²

Zhi Qian’s translation corpus, however, consistently presents not three but four heavens as belonging to this group:

| <u>Sanskrit</u> | <u>Zhi Qian</u> |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. <i>Brahmā</i> (P. id.) | <i>fan tian</i> 梵天 |
| 2. <i>Brahmakāyika</i> / <i>brahmapāriṣadya</i> (P. <i>brahmapārisajja</i>) | <i>fanzhong tian</i> 梵眾天 |
| 3. <i>Brahmapurohita</i> (P. id.) | <i>fanfu tian</i> 梵輔天 |
| 4. <i>Mahābrahma</i> (P. id.) | <i>dafan tian</i> 大梵天 |

It would be easy to infer that the first of these is simply a category-name (that is, a name referring to this entire group of heavens) misconstrued as a separate heavenly realm in itself, and this may well be the case. However, in one of Zhi Qian’s translations the heavens are individually numbered, and the four heavens listed above are assigned the numbers of 7 through 10. This certainly indicates that the Brahmā realm was understood by Zhi Qian himself as constituting a separate heaven. Lest we jump to the conclusion that this was simply an isolated mistake by one translator, we should note that one of Lokakṣema’s translations appears to do the same (though here the heavens are not numbered). Indeed, in this list (which occurs in two places in his *Daoxing jing* 道行經) the names *Brahmapurohita* and *Brahmakāyika* are also treated as referring to separate realms, thus yielding a total of five rather than four heavens in this group.²³

I have not been able to locate any other text that assigns five different names to this category as Lokakṣema does, but the shorter list of four heaven-names found in Zhi

²¹ See Gethin 1997.

²² There were, however, differences of opinion in India as to how many heavens were included in the Brahmā realm; the Kashmiri Vaibhāṣikas, for example, admitted only two (rejecting the existence of the Mahābrahma heaven as a separate realm; see the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, T1545, 27.509a23ff.), while the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* gives a list of four, consisting of *brahmakāyika*, *brahmapāriṣadya*, *brahmapurohita*, and *mahābrahmāṇa* (sic; see nos. 3085-3088). For further details on debates as to the number of heavens in the *rūpadhātu* as a whole see La Vallée Poussin 1923-26, vol. 3, pp. 2-4.

²³ See T224, 8.435a10-11 and 439c22.

Qian's work does occur elsewhere, and indeed it is not restricted to Chinese sources. A passage in the *Mahāvastu*, for example, reads *brahmā devā brahmakāyikā devā brahmapurohitā devā mahābrahmā devā* (Mv 2.314). This almost certainly refers to four different heavens,²⁴ and if Zhi Qian was using Indian manuscripts that listed the heavens of the Brahmā-realm in this way, it is easy to understand how he would have come up with the list of names given above.

The translation terms used here by Zhi Qian do not, in themselves, cause any difficulty, for their relationship to the corresponding Indic terminology is quite straightforward. It is somewhat surprising, however, that three of these four Chinese heaven-names do not appear in the work of any of Zhi Qian's predecessors. While *fan tian* 梵天 can easily be found in earlier translations (both as the name of a heaven and that of the god Brahmā himself),²⁵ neither *fanzhong tian* 梵眾天 ("heaven of Brahmā's assembly," presumably from a form of *brahmapāriṣadya* rather than *brahmakāyika*), nor *fanfu tian* 梵輔天 ("heaven of Brahmā's assistants"), nor even *dafan tian* 大梵天 ("heaven of Great Brahmā") can be found in any text that is certain to precede Zhi Qian's work in date.²⁶

b. Second *dhyāna*

When we come to the group of heavens associated with the second *dhyāna*, however, the divergence between Zhi Qian's renderings and those found in standard Sanskrit and Pāli sources—both in the number of realms assigned to this category and in the interpretation of their names—escalates dramatically. As before, the most commonly cited sources in Sanskrit and Pāli assign three heavens to this category: the heavens of limited radiance (Skt. *parittābha*, Pāli *parittābha*), of limitless radiance (Skt. *apramāṇābha*, Pāli *appamāṇābha*), and of brilliant (or "streaming") radiance (Skt. *ābhāsvara*, Pāli *ābhassara*). In Zhi Qian's case, by contrast, most of his translations list four heavens as belonging to this group, while one has no fewer than five. For these (with their actual or postulated Sanskrit counterparts provided for reference, in addition to the Pāli where available), Zhi Qian gives the following list:

| <u>Sanskrit</u> | <u>Zhi Qian</u> |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Ābhā</i> | <i>qingming tian</i> 清明天 |
| 2. * <i>Ābhāvacara</i> (?) | <i>shuixing tian</i> 水行天 ²⁷ |
| 3. <i>Parittābha</i> (P. <i>parittābha</i>) | <i>shuiwei tian</i> 水微天 |
| 4. <i>Apramāṇābha</i> (P. <i>appamāṇābha</i>) | <i>shui wuliang tian</i> 水無量天 (var. <i>wuliang shui tian</i> 無量水天) |
| 5. <i>Ābhāsvara</i> (P. <i>ābhassara</i>) | <i>shuiyin tian</i> 水音天 |

²⁴ Another important variant in the *Mahāvastu*, also treating what appears to be a category name as the name of a distinct heavens, will be discussed below.

²⁵ See for example An Shigao's *Renben yusheng jing* 人本欲生經 (T14, 1.245a11-12), Lokakṣema's *Daoxing jing* (T224, 8.431a1 and *passim*), and Kang Mengxiang's *Zhong benqi jing* 中本起經 (T196, 4.151a16).

²⁶ For another archaic text containing this vocabulary that may have been produced close to Zhi Qian's time see Appendix.

²⁷ T198 reads *shuixing* 水行 only.

The first of these, *qingming tian* 清明天, occurs at this point in only one list of heavens in Zhi Qian's work, that found in his translation of the "Proto-Buddhāvataṃsaka" (*Pusa benye jing* 菩薩本業經, T281, 10.447a27),²⁸ and it might be tempting to think that this very indigenous-sounding name was simply added in China.²⁹ The corresponding passage in an earlier translation by Lokakṣema of the same text, however, gives the first item in this group of heavens as *e tian* 熾天, a transcription that clearly points to an underlying *ābhā* "light."³⁰ Of this, *qingming* "clear brightness" would not be an unreasonable translation.

Here again, as in the case of the *brahmā* heavens, it appears that what looks like a generic category-name is being treated as a separate heaven-realm in itself. But as before, Zhi Qian (and Lokakṣema) are far from isolated in this respect, for parallel occurrences can be found in the *Mahāvastu*,³¹ as well as in two suttas in the Pāli *Majjhima-nikāya*.³² In fact it is the second item on the list, which has no parallel in Lokakṣema's translation, which seems to require explanation; we will return to this issue below after considering the remaining names in this category as a group.

Aside from the *Pusa benye jing*, all of Zhi Qian's translations in which lists of the *rūpadhātu* heavens occur assign just four (rather than five) heavens to this category, viz., nos. 2-5 listed above. And with the one minor exception noted above (*shui wuliang tian* vs. *wuliang shui tian*), these names are entirely consistent throughout these texts. Yet as translations they are quite surprising, for they all include the character *shui* 水 "water," though none of the corresponding Sanskrit or Pāli heaven-names contain such a term.

A superficial explanation is easy to find, for it seems that Zhi Qian has simply misread (or misheard) the elements *ābhā*, *-bha* and so on (all meaning "light") as if they were all permutations of *āpas* "water."³³ This is an unexpected error, to say the least, especially in view of the importance of light imagery in a broad range of Buddhist texts. But it is not only in translating the names of the *rūpadhātu* heavens that Zhi Qian seems

²⁸ Elsewhere, however, Zhi Qian uses *qingming tian* 清明天 as the equivalent of one of the third-*dhyāna* heavens (T6, 1.182b18); his other translations read *jingming tian* 淨明天, however, and the character 清 may be the result of a copyist's error.

²⁹ For a brief discussion of the Qingming festival see the online entry in the Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qingming_Festival.

³⁰ See the *Dousha jing* 兜沙經 (T280, 10.446a24). The same transcription occurs twice in T224 (8.435a11, erroneously written 熾 in several editions; and 439c23, with the variant form 熾 in some editions). The reconstructed Early Middle Chinese pronunciation of the character is ʔāp; for further details see Nattier 2006, pp. 191-192, where Lokakṣema's transcriptions of all of the heaven names in this category are discussed.

³¹ See Mv ii.314, 348, and 360.

³² See the *Sāleyyaka-sutta* (MN41, i.289.17) and the *Samkhārupapatti-sutta* (MN120, iii.102.25). MA explains that *ābhā* is not a separate category but a collective name for the three types of "heavens of radiance" whose names follow, though it is not clear to me that the authors of these two suttas had the same opinion (see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 1234, n. 426).

³³ Just because a certain text contains evidence of oral/aural misunderstandings, this does not constitute evidence that the translator himself was working from an orally transmitted text. On the contrary, evidence of an earlier period of oral transmission can be preserved in a written text used by a subsequent translator.

to have seen a mirage—that is, to have perceived water when it was not really there. His treatment of the names of several bodhisattvas in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* shows the same inclination. Thus the name **Ratnajālin* is translated as *Bao shui* (“Jewel-water”), *Jālinīprabha* (< *jāla* “net” + *prabha* “light”) as *Shui guang* 水光 (“water-light”), and *Brahmajālin* as *Fan shui* 梵水 (“Brahma-water”).³⁴ Just as in the case of the *rūpadhātu* heavens, where Zhi Qian was inclined to read forms of *ābhā* “light” in compounds as if they were derivatives of *āpas* “water,” so in the case of bodhisattva names he was inclined to perceive forms of the word *jāla* “net” as if they were derived from *jala* “water.”³⁵ In fact, as Bokenkamp has observed, proper names are a particularly good place to observe a translator’s preferences at work, because they lack any contextual information that would restrict his translation choices.³⁶

At first glance these would seem to be simply the result of visual or aural errors on Zhi Qian’s part.³⁷ It is not difficult, for example, to find other examples in his work of confusions concerning vowel length (*a* vs. *ā*, for example), a tendency which may be due in part to the transmission of some of his source-texts in the Kharoṣṭhī script, in which vowel length was generally not marked. Nor is it rare to find translations that suggest he sometimes had difficulty in distinguishing voiced from unvoiced consonants (e.g., *p* vs. *b*), or the presence or absence of aspiration (e.g., *b* vs. *bh*),³⁸ a problem which is likely to be due to oral rather than written transmission of his Indic-language texts.

Yet if this were a matter of simple errors we would expect Zhi Qian to make them equally in both directions—that is, to read *jāla* “net” as if it were *jala* “water” in one case, while doing precisely the opposite (mistaking *jala* “water” for *jāla* “net”) in another. In other words, random errors might be expected to exhibit a certain symmetry, with an equal tendency to mistake a long vowel for a short one in one instance and a short vowel for a long one in another.

But this is not what we find in the present case. Instead, there is a noticeable tendency in Zhi Qian’s work to translate any term that might be perceived as having a phonetic similarity to an Indic-language word for “water” (e.g., *jala* or *āpas*) as *shui* 水, a tendency which is not paralleled by errors made in the other direction. And this inclination

³⁴ For Zhi Qian’s rendering of these names see T474, 14.519b11 and 16-17; for the corresponding Sanskrit names see Taishō University Study Group on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature 2004, p. 8, ms. 2b3-6. In the extant manuscript the last of these names reads *indrajālinā* (in the instrumental case), but Zhi Qian’s source apparently had the name **ratnajālin* (or **ratnajāla*) instead.

³⁵ These examples were presented in Nattier 2001, and their implications within a Chinese cultural context discussed in Bokenkamp 2001.

³⁶ Bokenkamp 2001.

³⁷ Given the visual similarity between the characters 水 “water” and *guang* 光 “light” it is important to raise the possibility that these names might originally have been translated by Zhi Qian using the character 光, but that it was subsequently miscopied as 水. This seems to be an unlikely error, however; indeed, given the prominence of light-imagery in Buddhist scriptures, one would rather expect the reverse. But the fact that the use of 水 in this context occurs consistently across Zhi Qian’s corpus makes it extremely unlikely that the variety of copyists responsible for transmitting these disparate texts would all have made the same mistake.

³⁸ This is all the more true of the works of Dharmarakṣa (Zhu Fahu 竺法護, fl. 265-309). For a convenient discussion of errors in his work—some of them quite disastrous—see Boucher 1998.

to see “water” in the texts he was reading is probably significant. As Stephen Bokenkamp has pointed out, water had great cosmological significance in some Chinese philosophical circles during this period, as seen for example in the very title of the recently recovered text *Taiyi sheng shui* 太一生水. Nor is this simply a matter of a single text, important as it might be. As Sarah Allan has argued, common metaphors used to express the actions of the Dao are watery in nature,³⁹ and in a more concrete sense water was the central focus of the “Way of Clear Water” (*qingshui dao* 清水道), a religious group which claimed adherents even in the imperial household in southeastern China around Zhi Qian’s time.⁴⁰ It is thus worth considering the possibility that these translations are not the result of mere phonological misperceptions on Zhi Qian’s part, but were rather the products of a culturally-conditioned “strong (mis)reading,” in which he was predisposed to see references to water wherever possible. What he translated, in other words, is what he thought the text surely *ought* to say.

Returning to the specific names on Zhi Qian’s list, the second is the most difficult to explain, for it has no obvious Sanskrit or Pāli counterpart. The character *xing* 行 “go, carry out,” however, suggests an underlying form of the verb \sqrt{car} , and we might postulate that Zhi Qian’s source contained a form such as **ābhāvacara* “belonging to the *ābhā* [realm].” Though this derivation must remain speculative, the remaining names on the list have attested Indic-language equivalents, and it is now straightforward to draw connections between these terms and what we find in Zhi Qian’s texts. For *parīttābha* (“limited radiance”) the translation *shuiwei tian* 水微天 (lit. “water-subtlety heaven”) is easy to understand, now that we recognize Zhi Qian’s propensity to find water in his sources whenever possible. Likewise, interpreting *apramāṇābha* “unlimited light” as *shui wuliang tian* 水無量天 (var. *wuliang shui tian* 無量水天) “unlimited water” is no longer inexplicable. In the last case, however, Zhi Qian has not only interpreted *ābhā* as “water,” but he has taken the component *-svara* in the sense of “sound” or “voice,” yielding the translation *shuiyin tian* 水音天 “water-sound heaven.” Though modern scholars do not agree on the etymology of the Indian name, they have generally derived it either from *ābhā* + \sqrt{svar} “to shine, be bright” or from *ābhā* + $\sqrt{śr}$ “emitting light.”⁴¹ Zhi Qian was not the first to treat the component *-svara* as meaning “voice,” however, for An Shigao had previously interpreted it in just this way.⁴²

c. Third *dhyāna*

When we come to Zhi Qian’s rendition of the heavens associated with the third *dhyāna*,

³⁹ See Allan 1997 (also cited in Bokenkamp 2001).

⁴⁰ Bokenkamp cites an account preserved in the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 [Biographies of Buddhist Nuns] of a confrontation between a nun and a master of this group (T2063, 50.936b15ff; cited in Bokenkamp 2001, p. 3, n. 2) which took place in 371 or 372 CE, approximately a century after Zhi Qian’s time. For a translation of the passage from the *Scripture of the Inner Explanations of the Three Heavens* (*Santian neijie jing* 三天內解經, HY 1196) critiquing the practice of the “Way of Clear Water” see Bokenkamp 1997, pp. 218-219.

⁴¹ See PTSD 103a.

⁴² See T14, 1.245a14, *ming sheng* 明聲 “bright voice.”

the pattern of divergence from standard Indic-language sources becomes even more apparent. Three heavens would be expected, according to Sanskrit and Pāli sources, to appear at this point in the list: the heavens of limited auspiciousness (Skt. *parīttasubha*, Pāli *parittasubha*), of limitless auspiciousness (Skt. *apramāṇasubha*, Pāli *appamāṇasubha*), and of complete auspiciousness (Skt. *śubhakṛtsna*, Pāli *subbhakiṇṇa* ~ *subbhakiṇha*).⁴³ In Zhi Qian's case, however, we find a minimum of five, and in one case no fewer than seven, names in this category.

For this group of heavens Zhi Qian's translations do not include anything that can be identified as a separate "category name" (though Lokakṣema's earlier translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā* does contain such a term).⁴⁴ But even without this his work offers a much longer list of heavens than expected. Indeed, at this point Zhi Qian's texts begin to diverge dramatically not only from extant Indian sources, but from one another as well. Before attempting to correlate his translations with Sanskrit and Pāli sources, therefore, it may be useful to present his own renditions (which are given in full in Appendix 1 below) in tabular form:

| <u>T6</u> | <u>T198</u> | <u>T225B</u> | <u>T281</u> |
|-----------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 第十五約淨天 | 約淨天 | 約淨天 | 約淨天 |
| 第十六遍淨天 | 遍淨天 | 遍淨天 | 遍淨天 |
| 第十七清明天 | 淨明天 | 淨明天 | 淨明天 |
| 第十八守妙天 | 守妙天 | 守妙天 | 守妙天 |
| 第十九玄妙天 | 玄妙天 | 玄妙天 | --- |
| --- | --- | --- | 微妙天 |
| --- | --- | --- | 廣妙天 |
| --- | --- | --- | 極妙天 |

The first three of the above names are relatively uncomplicated. First of all, as I have shown elsewhere, *subha* is part of a cluster of words—including *suddha*, *viśuddha*, and (somewhat surprisingly) *vyūha*—that Zhi Qian generally translates in identical fashion as *jīng* 淨 "pure."⁴⁵ Bearing this practice in mind, we can easily align the name *yuejīng tian* 約淨天 "heaven of abbreviated purity" with Sanskrit *parīttasubha* "limited auspiciousness," while a correlation between *bianjīng* 遍淨 "pervasive purity" and Sanskrit *apramāṇasubha* "limitless auspiciousness" is unproblematic as well. Zhi Qian's use of *jīngmíng* 淨明 (with a variant reading *qīngmíng* 清明 at this point in T6 alone) for the category referred to in Sanskrit texts as *śubhakṛtsna* is less straightforward, but it seems likely that Zhi Qian intended this name as a translation of the third item on the Indic-language list.⁴⁶

⁴³ Gethin and others translate *subha* as "beauty" here, which can easily be justified on the basis of Pāli sources, but the term has a far broader meaning in other Indian texts, and—as we shall see—Zhi Qian has a quite different interpretation.

⁴⁴ See T224, 8.435a12 and 439c24, where this category begins with the name *shouhe tian* 首呵天 "Śubha heaven." There is no equivalent of this name in the parallel passages in Zhi Qian's translation of (a slightly different recension of) the same text (T225B, 8.485a12, 487a24).

⁴⁵ See Nattier 2007a, pp. 376-377. For a detailed and nuanced discussion of the distinction between *subha* "auspicious" and (*vi*)*suddha* "pure" in Indian religious literature see Carman and Marglin 1985.

⁴⁶ Note that the Pāli form of the name ends in *-kiṇṇa*, which alternates with *-kiṇha* "black, dark"

From this point on things become increasingly chaotic: the names *shoumiao tian* 守妙天 “heaven of protecting the marvelous” and *xuanmiao tian* 玄妙天 “heaven of the obscure and marvelous” have no obvious equivalents in Indian sources,⁴⁷ despite the fact that they are clearly numbered as constituting discrete categories in Zhi Qian’s *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (T6). If they indeed reflect an alternate Indian tradition, this would suggest that additional heavens in the third-*dhyāna* category were known in India, but further research will be needed to demonstrate whether this could indeed be the case.

For the last three names in the chart above, however (found only in Zhi Qian’s *Pusa benye jing* 菩薩本業經, T281), a simpler solution may be available, for these names appear to recapitulate the first three items on the list—that is, the Indian terms *parīttasubha* (here rendered as *weimiao* 微妙 “limited marvelousness”), *apramāṇasubha* (*guangmiao* 廣妙 “broad marvelousness”), and *subhakarṣṇa* (*jimiao* 極妙 “ultimate marvelousness”). If this is the case, that would mean that what we find in this category, at least in the *Pusa benye jing*, is a combination of names based on Indian sources and further glosses based on Chinese exegesis, which were subsequently interpreted as independent names in their own right. While this can only be proposed and not proven, it is worth noting that the *Pusa benye jing* exhibits great freedom in the appropriation of indigenous religious terminology in other passages, notably in its highly idiosyncratic list of the ten epithets of the Buddha.⁴⁸ Given the distinct possibility that these last three names, at a minimum, were added in China, it would be extremely hazardous to use the long list of third-*dhyāna* heavens found in Zhi Qian’s translations (especially the seven-item list in the *Pusa benye jing*) as evidence for the existence of comparable traditions in India.

In light of the above, and provisionally treating the *weimiao*, *guangmiao*, and *jingming* heavens as variant renderings of the first three items on the list, we may now reframe the renditions of the third-*dhyāna* heavens in Zhi Qian’s translations as follows:

| Sanskrit | Zhi Qian |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Parīttasubha</i> (P. <i>parittasubha</i>) | <i>yuejing tian</i> 約淨天, <i>weimiao tian</i> 微妙天 |
| 2. <i>Apramāṇasubha</i> (P. <i>appamānasubha</i>) | <i>bianjing tian</i> 遍淨天, <i>guangmiao tian</i> 廣妙天 |
| 3. <i>Subhakarṣṇa</i> (P. <i>subbhakirṇa/subhakinha</i>) | <i>jingming tian</i> 淨明天, <i>jingming tian</i> 淨明天 |
| 4. ? | <i>shoumiao tian</i> 守妙天 |
| 5. ? | <i>xuanmiao tian</i> 玄妙天 |

(equated with *kanha* in MA I.254). Could Zhi Qian have read a Prakrit form of this name as consisting of *subha* + “non-dark,” and thus translated this portion of the word as “bright” (*ming* 明)?

⁴⁷ For *xuanmiao* 玄妙 Hirakawa (BCSD 819a) gives the quite unexpected equivalent *dūram-gama* “far-going,” but if this is indeed the case in another text (no reference is given) it is not relevant here.

⁴⁸ See Nattier 2003, pp. 234-235, and cf. also the M.A. thesis by Shi Chikai cited there (Shi 2000, pp. 43). Given the fact that these extra heaven names—like the idiosyncratic list of the Buddha’s epithets—appear only here, and not elsewhere in Zhi Qian’s corpus, it is also worth considering the possibility that these items might not have been contained in Zhi Qian’s original translation, but were added (in the case of the heaven names) or altered (in the case of the ten epithets) by subsequent users of the text in China. The *Pusa benye jing* was, in fact, one of the most avidly appropriated translations in all of Zhi Qian’s corpus; for details concerning both Buddhist and Daoist texts that exhibit dependence upon this work see Nattier 2007b, Appendix 2, “Borrowings from the *Pusa benye jing* and the *Dousha jing* Group in Indigenous Chinese Scriptures.”

d. Fourth *dhyāna*

The heavens corresponding to the fourth *dhyāna* are traditionally divided into two groups: an upper group known as the “pure abodes” (*śuddhāvāsa*, Pāli *suddhāvāsa*) and a lower group that bears no special label. And within the lower group there are notable discrepancies among Indian sources. The *Abhidharmakośa*, for example, assigns three heavens to this lower group: from lowest to highest, they are the heavens entitled “cloudless” (*anabhraka*), “engendering merit” (*punya-prasava*), and “great reward” (*brhatphala*). Pāli sources, on the other hand, list only two: the heavens of “great reward” (*vehapphala*) and of “unconscious beings” (*asañña-satta*). Some Sanskrit sources, such as the *Divyāvadana* and the *Avadanaśataka*, generally conform to the list found in the *Abhidharmakośa*, but the *Lalitavistara* inserts an extra category of *asaññisattva* (cf. Pāli *asaññasatta*) after *brhatphala*.⁴⁹ In light of this variety it is not surprising that Zhi Qian’s lists of the heaven names in this group are difficult to align with any of the so-called standard systems.

Yet in both Pāli and Sanskrit sources the names of the upper five heavens of this group, i.e., the so-called “pure abodes,” are relatively invariable. In order once again from the lowest to the highest level, we would expect to find here the heavens known as *Avṛha*, var. *Abṛha* (Pāli *aviha*), *Atapa* (P. *atappa*), *Sudṛśa* (P. *sudassa*), *Sudarśana* (P. *sudassin*), and *Akaṇiṣṭha* (P. *akanitṭha*). But it is immediately evident that Zhi Qian’s list does not contain nearly enough names to account for all of these. In most of his translations the entire group of fourth-*dhyāna* heavens contains only five names, while in one (the *Pusa benye jing*, T281) it contains six. But in no case does it contain equivalents of all of the expected seven or eight fourth-*dhyāna* heavens, thus offering a counter-example to his treatment of the third-*dhyāna* heavens, where all of his extant translations contain more than the expected number of names.

Because there are again some discrepancies within Zhi Qian’s corpus itself, it may be useful once again to begin by presenting his renditions of these names in tabular form:

| <u>T6</u> | <u>T198</u> | <u>T225B</u> | <u>T281</u> |
|-----------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 第二十福德天 | 福德天 | 福德天 | 福愛天 |
| 第二十一愍淳天 | 德淳天 | 德純天 | 愛勝天 |
| 第二十二近天 | 近際天 | 近際天 | 近際天 |
| --- | --- | --- | 善觀天 |
| 第二十三快見天 | 快見天 | 快見天 | 快見天 |
| 第二十四無結愛天 | 無結愛天 | 無結愛天 | 無結愛天 |

This portion of Zhi Qian’s list begins with a name that appears to correspond best (of the available Indic-language candidates) to *punya-prasava* “engendering merit,” viz., *fude tian* 福德天 “heaven of meritorious qualities.”⁵⁰ Likewise the last, *wujie’ai tian* 無結愛天, though certainly unexpected, can be correlated with elements of the term *akaṇiṣṭha*

⁴⁹ See Hokazono 1994, p. 578; in the P. L. Vaidya edition see p. 104.

⁵⁰ The variant translation found in the *Pusa benye jing*, *fu’ai tian* 福愛天 “heaven of merit-love” (?) seems less appropriate.

“supreme.”⁵¹ Of the *sudṛśa* “lovely” (i.e., “good to see”) and *sudarsana* “clear-sighted” heavens, the former (in the straightforward equivalence *shanguan tian* 善觀天 “heaven of good viewing”) occurs only in the *Pusa benye jing*. An equivalent of *sudarsana*, by contrast, appears in all four of the above texts as *kuaijian tian* 快見天 “heaven of quick perception.”

This leaves us with two items that are more difficult to explain, viz., nos. 21 and 22 on the list given in Zhi Qian’s *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (T6). The second of these is relatively consistent, appearing as *jinji tian* 近際天 “heaven of proximate boundaries” (?) in three of the four above texts, with the shorter *jin tian* 近天 “proximate heaven” in T6 alone. None of the available names of heavens belonging to the fourth *dhyāna* offers an obvious match to this wording, but the fact that the parallel to T225B in Kumārajīva’s translation of the Shorter Perfection of Wisdom (T227, 8.544c13) reads *wuguang* 無廣 (var. -*guang* 誑), i.e., “not extensive/broad,” suggests that Zhi Qian may have interpreted the name *avṛha*, var. *abrha* (P. *aviha*) as meaning “close together, not expanded,” i.e., as a negative form of *√brh* “increase, expand.”

The sole remaining item in this group, then, is no. 21 on the list found in T6, and here the renditions of this name vary widely from one of Zhi Qian’s translations to another. While some appear closely related to one another (e.g., *que chun* 慇淳 “simple, honest” in T6, *de chun* 德淳 “[one whose] qualities are simple” in T198, and *de chun* 德純 [*id.*] in T225B), the translation given in the *Pusa benye jing* (T281) again diverges from the other versions, reading *ai sheng* 愛勝 “conquest of [or ‘by’?] desire.” None of these terms offers an obvious correlation to any of the available Indic-language names, though it seems possible (but very far from certain) that they are to be aligned with *atapa* (P. *atappa*), a name whose meaning is itself less than clear.⁵² If this is the case, however, the sequence would be different in Zhi Qian’s work than in any of the Sanskrit or Pāli sources I have consulted, where the *avṛha* heaven is at a lower level than the *atapa*.

In sum, we find in Zhi Qian’s works a significantly abbreviated list of fourth-*dhyāna* heavens, some of whose names are difficult to correlate with any of the standard Indic-language lists. Correlating his renderings very provisionally with Sanskrit and Pāli terms, we may summarize them as follows:

| Sanskrit | Zhi Qian |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>punyaḥprasava</i> (P. --) | <i>fude tian</i> 福德天 (var. <i>fu'ai tian</i> 福愛天) |
| 2. <i>atapa</i> (P. <i>atappa</i>) (?) | <i>que chun tian</i> 慇淳天 (var. <i>de chun tian</i> 德淳天, <i>de chun tian</i> 德純天, <i>ai sheng tian</i> 愛勝天) |
| 3. <i>avṛha</i> , var. <i>abrha</i> (P. <i>aviha</i>) | <i>jinji tian</i> 近際天 (var. <i>jin tian</i> 近天) |

⁵¹ Zhi Qian seems to have interpreted the latter part of this term as *-iṣṭa* “desired, beloved” (*ai* 愛). The beginning of the word, with *wu* 無 for *a-* (interpreted as a negative prefix) is also understandable. The source of the character *jie* 結 “tie, knot” is less obvious; could Zhi Qian have interpreted the component *-kan-* (perhaps in a Prakrit form *-gan-*) as related to *grantha* (cf. Pāli *gantha*) “bond, fetter”? Inexplicably, Hirakawa (BCSD 777a) gives *wujie'ai tian* 無結愛天 as the equivalent of *ārūpyāvaca* “dwelling in the formless [realm].”

⁵² Gethin (1997, p. 194) translates the Pāli as “serene,” while Kloetzli (1983, p. 34) translates the Sanskrit as “no heat.” Edgerton (BHSD, 8b) does not offer any translation, which may be telling in itself.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 4. <i>sudṛṣa</i> (P. <i>sudassa</i>) | <i>shanguan tian</i> 善觀天 ⁵³ |
| 5. <i>sudarśana</i> (P. <i>sudassī</i>) | <i>kuaijian tian</i> 快見天 |
| 6. <i>akaniṣṭha</i> (P. <i>akaniṭṭha</i>) | <i>wujie'ai tian</i> 無結愛天 |

This group of names, in sum, is the most chaotic portion of Zhi Qian's list of heavens.

(3) Heavens of the *Arūpadhātu*

Finally we come to the highest level of the Buddhist cosmos: the set of four heavens assigned to the “formless realm,” or *arūpadhātu*. Scholars hasten to point out that, unlike those discussed above, these are not places that can be located in space, for they have no form; thus it is not legitimate to describe them as having a physical location “above” the *kāmadhātu* and *rūpadhātu* heavens (e.g., Sadakata 1997, pp. 75-76). Yet their place as the four highest levels of meditative attainment in this formalized cosmology is secure.

Only one of Zhi Qian's translations, his (non-Mahāyāna) *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (T6), gives a complete list of the four formless realms; one other text in his corpus, the *Pusa benye jing* (T281), mentions only two heavens belonging to this realm. Zhi Qian's corpus thus represents the polar opposite of that of An Shigao: it contains abundant references to the heavens of the *kāmadhātu* and a substantial number of references to the *rūpadhātu* heavens, but very few to the *arūpadhātu* realms.

Because there are so few occurrences of the terms in this category, we may proceed directly to aligning them with their Indic counterparts. The Sanskrit and Pāli sources agree on assigning four heavens to this category: in ascending order, they are the realms of infinite space (*ākāśānantyāyatana*, P. *ākāśānañcāyatana*), of infinite consciousness (*viññānāntyāyatana*, P. *viññānañcāyatana*), of nothingness (*akiñcanyāyatana*, P. *akiñcaññāyatana*), and of neither perception nor non-perception (*naīvasamjñānāsaññāyatana*, P. *nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). In Zhi Qian's work we find the following equivalents (as the Pāli is given immediately above, I will not repeat it in the chart here):

| Sanskrit | T6 | T281 |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Ākāśānantyāyatana</i> | <i>kong hui ru tian</i> 空慧入天 | --- |
| 2. <i>Viññānāntyāyatana</i> | <i>shi hui ru tian</i> 識慧入天 | <i>shi hui tian</i> 識慧天 |
| 3. <i>Akiñcanyāyatana</i> | <i>bu yong hui ru tian</i> 不用慧入天 | <i>wusuonian hui tian</i> 無所念慧天 |
| 4. <i>Naīvasamjñānāsaññāyatana</i> | <i>bu xiang ru tian</i> 不想入天 ⁵⁴ | --- |

Several things are noteworthy about the above examples. First, in Zhi Qian's translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (T6), the element *-āyatana* is regularly represented, using the character *ru* 入 “entrance.”⁵⁵ In the *Pusa benye jing* (T281), by contrast, it is not. Whether this is a significant difference remains to be established, but it is important not

⁵³ This name appears only in Zhi Qian's *Pusa benye jing* (T281).

⁵⁴ A shorter form *bu xiang tian* 不想天 occurs in isolation in T225B (8.500c22).

⁵⁵ I would like to thank Stefano Zacchetti for calling my attention to this feature, which distinguishes Zhi Qian's renditions in T6 from the earlier translations of An Shigao (personal communication, November 2005).

to overlook such differences in drawing comparisons between the terminology of one text and another. Second, though the names of the first two heavens both include a component meaning “limitless” in their standard Indic-language forms (Skt. *anantya*, Pāli *anañca*), there is no reflection of this in Zhi Qian’s translations. On the contrary, he appears to have seen in his sources a (presumably Prakrit) form of the word *jñāna* (here translated as *hui* 慧 “wisdom”). Finally, in the case of the fourth heaven, Zhi Qian’s translation contains no equivalent of the second part of the name; that is, instead of reading “neither perception nor non-perception” (Skt. *naivasamijñā-nāsamijñā*), his rendition consists only of “not having concepts” (*bu xiang* 不想), indicating that he perceived his source as reading only *naivasamijñā* (in addition to the word *āyatana*).

Not all of the above choices were original, however, to Zhi Qian. While he does appear to be the first to have used the term *ru* 入 to translate *āyatana* in this context, his use of the terms *kong hui* 空慧 to translate *Ākāśānantya* and *shi hui* 識慧 to translate *Vijñānānantya* have exact parallels in earlier translations by An Shigao.⁵⁶ Near or exact parallels can also be found there for the other heaven names in this group as well.⁵⁷

In sum, whereas in the case of the *rūpadhātu* heavens Zhi Qian was obliged to coin the translations of many of these heavens for the first time,⁵⁸ for the *arūpadhātu* he could rely on the work of an illustrious predecessor. Thus an analysis of the significance of the above terminology will have to be conducted not only within the context of Zhi Qian’s own translation practices, but with respect to An Shigao’s terminology and style as well.

Conclusions

Zhi Qian’s corpus contains a wealth of data on the names and numbers of Buddhist heavens. In some cases his work seems clearly to reflect non-standard Indian traditions, as when he assigns four (rather than three) heavens to the level of the *rūpadhātu* corresponding to the first *dhyāna* (i.e., the *brahmaloka*), or when he apparently treats **Ābhā* (presumably a category-name referring to all of the heavens of the second *dhyāna*) as the name of a separate heavenly realm in itself. In other cases, however, his translations assign a significantly different number of names to a given cosmological level than can be found in any Indian text that I have examined. In the case of the third *dhyāna*, we have seen that his list (especially the one contained in the *Pusa benye jing*) contains a significantly larger number of names than would be expected, and here we may have to do with Chinese glosses that have come to be treated as separate heaven names. Conversely,

⁵⁶ For 空慧 see T13, 1.239a12, and T14, 1.245b28 and *passim*; for 識慧 see T13, 1.239a16 (the name is written with the additional character 行 at 239a14 and 15), and T14, 245a21 and *passim*).

⁵⁷ For antecedents to Zhi Qian’s rendering of the third *arūpadhātu* heaven in T6 see An Shigao’s T14, which contains both a longer form (不用無所用慧行, 1.246a17) and a shorter one (不用慧, 248a18). The form given in T281 (無所念慧天) has no parallel in earlier translations, but the same wording occurs in T511 (14.780b14), where it is explicitly labeled as the 27th heaven. T511 resembles Zhi Qian’s style in a number of respects; further research is needed to clarify the relationship between this text and Zhi Qian’s translation corpus.

⁵⁸ Lokaksema’s work, as noted above, also includes lists of Buddhist heavens, but here they are virtually all transcribed rather than translated, so they did not offer precedents for Zhi Qian’s translation choices.

Zhi Qian's list of the heavens corresponding to the fourth *dhyāna* is shorter than expected; to what extent this reflects an alternative tradition circulating in India still remains to be established.

As to the heaven names themselves, we have seen that some of his terminology was borrowed from earlier translators (notably An Shigao and Lokakṣema), while other names appear to have been coined by Zhi Qian himself. In cases where Zhi Qian simply adopted pre-existing terminology, of course, such names must be evaluated within the context of the work of the translator who first produced them. In those cases where Zhi Qian seems to have introduced new translations himself, by contrast, these names can reveal a great deal about his own understanding of Indian Buddhist terminology as well as about the Chinese cultural context within which he worked.

As we have seen, a number of the names used by Zhi Qian (whether borrowed or coined by himself) appear to be erroneous when viewed from the perspective of Sanskrit or Prakrit etymology. But the examples reviewed above also make it clear that, whenever we encounter what appears to be an error in a Chinese Buddhist translation, we should not simply assume that the translator made a careless or ignorant mistake. Instead, there are a number of possible scenarios for how such deviations could come about, and in each case we should consider all three of the following possibilities.

(1) First, it may be that the translator did simply make a mistake, based on a mis-reading (or mis-hearing) of his Indic-language source. This is most likely to be the case when there is nothing at stake: that is, when the supposed error does not have any implications for doctrine or practice.

(2) Second, while the translator's rendition may be technically erroneous with respect to Indian Buddhist understandings, this may be due to his own cultural and religious context, which led him to misunderstand (from our point of view) the wording found in his Indian source. This is, however, a quite different kind of error—what I have referred to above as a “strong (mis)reading,” e.g., in the case of Zhi Qian's predilection for seeing water in his source-texts—which can reveal the values or images that are of importance to the translator, thus illuminating his own interpretive stance.

(3) Third, an apparently mistaken rendition may not actually be an error at all, but rather a reflection of an alternative Indian understanding of a given term. If we did not have Indian commentaries to support such interpretations, we might well dismiss the Tibetan translation of *arhat* as “enemy-slayer” (*dgra bcom pa*), for example, or one of Zhi Qian's translations of the same as “unattached” (*wu suo zhuo* 無所著), as simple mistakes.⁵⁹ Thus while at the present stage of our knowledge some of Zhi Qian's heaven names do appear to be erroneous, we should remain open to the possibility that we will one day encounter an Indian source that supports his interpretation.

In sum, Zhi Qian's translations provide us with a rich source of information on Indian Buddhist understandings of the heavenly realms, while also offering us a window into how Zhi Qian, as an inhabitant of the Chinese cultural sphere, carried out his work, including clues as to the language of the texts from which he worked. Above all, perhaps, his idiosyncratic renditions challenge us to refine our scholarly methods of dealing with translations that appear, at first glance, to be nothing more than mistakes.

⁵⁹ On the multiple interpretations of the word *arhat* in India see Nattier 2003, pp. 217-219.

Appendix 1: Passages Containing Lists of Heavens in Zhi Qian's Translations

Because I have dealt only with individual heaven names in the discussion above, it seemed useful to include here for reference the integral passages in which this terminology appears. In doing so I am following the lead of Jonathan Silk, who used this technique to good effect in a recent study on a quite different topic (Silk 2008).

A. Texts listing the heavens of the *kāmadhātu*, *rūpadhātu* and *arūpadhātu*

T6: *Banniebuan jing* 般泥洹經 (twenty-eight heavens, individually numbered)

佛亦上入第一四天王。遍上第二忉利天、第三焰天、第四兜術天、第五不憍樂天、第六化應聲天。周印魔又上第七梵天、第八梵眾天、第九梵輔天、第十大梵天、第十一水行天、第十二水微天、第十三水無量天、第十四水音天、第十五約淨天、第十六遍淨天、第十七清明天、第十八守妙天、第十九玄妙天、第二十福德天、第二十一愍淳天、第二十二近天、第二十三快見天、第二十四無結愛天。我皆周遍若干百千人。是諸天隨形貌與相見。樂清淨者為說清淨。達道意者勸使布化。在清人者立以大其解法情即授以要。誘勸導利化使得道訖輒捨歿。彼諸天輩莫知我誰。是佛之難有自然法也。上餘四天皆無形聲。故佛不往第二十五空慧入天、第二十六識慧入天、第二十七不用慧入天、第二十八不想入天。(1.182b11-28)

T281: *Pusa benye jing* 菩薩本業經 (thirty heavens, though the text refers to twenty-eight)

是時悉現百億須彌山百億日月及四天王天、忉利天、炎天、兜術天、不憍樂天、化應聲天、梵天、梵眾天、梵輔天、大梵天、清明天、水行天、水微天、水無量天、水音天、約淨天、遍淨天、淨明天、守妙天、微妙天、廣妙天、極妙天、福愛天、愛勝天、近際天善觀天、快見天、無結愛天、識慧天、無所念慧天至二十八無色天。各有百億。此為一佛刹。號曰忍世界。(10.447a24-b2)

B. Texts listing heavens of the *kāmadhātu* and *rūpadhātu* only

T198: *Yizu jing* 義足經 (twenty-four heavens of the *kāmadhātu* and *rūpadhātu*, though the realm of the four heavenly kings is not mentioned in this section)

聞如是。佛在忉利天上。當竟夏月。波利質多樹花適好盛。坐濡軟石上欲為母說經。及忉利天上諸天。爾時天王釋到佛所為佛作禮。(4.184c25-28) . . . 如力士屈伸臂頃佛於忉利天上至鹽天為諸天說經。滅於鹽天即至兜術天。復從兜術天滅即至不憍樂天、化應聲天、梵眾天、梵輔天、大梵天、水行、水微天、無量水天、水音天、約淨天、遍淨天、淨明天、守妙天、玄妙天、福德天、德淳天、近際天、快見天、無結愛天。已說經悉使大歡悅。(4.185b21-27)

T225B: *Da mingdu jing* 大明度經 (gods of the twenty-four heavens of the *kāmadhātu* and *rūpadhātu*)

四天大王、忉利天、鹽天、兜術天、不驕樂天、化應聲天、梵天、梵眾天、梵輔天、大梵天、水行天、水微天、無量水天、水音天、約淨天、遍淨天、淨明天、守妙天、玄妙天、福德天、德純天、近際天、快見天、無結愛天上諸天子皆往問訊聽受作禮繞竟各去。(8.485a10-15)

C. Texts listing the *kāmadhātu* heavens only

T87: *Zhai jing* 齋經

- (1) 第一四天王、第二忉利天、鹽天、兜術天、不驕樂天、化應聲天。(1.911c10-11)
- (2) 天上廣遠不可稱說。當今人間五十歲為第一天上一日一夜。第一四天上壽五百歲。彼當人間九百萬歲。佛法齋者得生此天上。人間百歲為忉利天上一日一夜。忉利天壽千歲。當人間三千六百萬歲。人間二百歲為鹽天上一日一夜。鹽天壽二千歲。當人間一億五千二百萬歲。人間四百歲為兜術天上一日一夜。兜術天壽四千歲。當人間六億八百萬歲。人間八百歲為不驕樂天上一日一夜。不驕樂天壽八千歲。當人間二十三億四千萬歲。人間千六百歲為化應聲天上一日一夜。化應聲天壽萬六千歲。當人間九十二億一千六百萬歲。(911c21-912a4)

T169: *Yueming pusa jing* 月明菩薩經

無數人生四王天上。無數人生忉利天上。無數人生鹽天上。無數人生兜術天上。無數人生尼摩羅天上。無數人生魔天上。無數人生梵天上。無數人受別發無上正真道意。(3.411b9-13):

Appendix 2: The List of Twenty-eight Heavens in the

Fo banniehuan jing 佛般泥洹經 (T5)

In a recent study the late Jungnok Park suggested that the *Banniehuan jing* 般泥洹經 (T6), which I have treated here and elsewhere as a translation by Zhi Qian, is a revision of a similar work entitled *Fo banniehuan jing* 佛般泥洹經 (T5) which he views as Zhi Qian's work (see Park forthcoming). Park's argument rests largely on the fact that T6 is composed in a more elegant and literary style, rendering it unlikely that the less polished text of T5 could be a revision of T6. This argument certainly has merit, but the relationship between the two texts is more complex than this general observation would indicate. In particular, the passage that concerns us here contains a list of heavens that is virtually identical to that found in T6, yet the narrative context within which the list is framed in T5 is considerably richer and more detailed than that given in T6. While Zhi Qian is certainly well known for abbreviating the work of his predecessors, what we see here does not conform to his normal pattern of retaining the overall story line while simply condensing the wording somewhat. Since a detailed study of the relationship between T5 and T6 lies beyond the range of the present paper, I will simply present here the corresponding passage in T5 for convenience of reference.

授經道遍已我上第一天上四天王所。我作天上衣服言語。我問天：“若作何等經？”天言：“我不知經。”我即為說經竟。便化沒去。天亦不知我為誰。我復上第二忉利天上。化作忉利天上衣服語言。我問忉利天：“若作何等經？”忉利天言：“不知經。”我為說經竟。便化沒去。天亦不知我為誰。我復上第三鹽天上。化作鹽天上衣服語言。我問鹽天：“若作何等經？”天言：“我不知經。”我為說經。我復上第四兜術天上。化作其天上衣服語言。我問天：“作何等經？”其天言：“彌勒為我說經。”我重復為說經。我復上至第五不憍樂天上。作其天上衣服語言。我問天：“若知經不？”其天言：“不知經。”我為說經化沒去。天皆不知我為誰。我復上第六化應聲天上。作其天上衣服語言。我問天：“若作何等經？”天言：“不知經。”我為說經。即復化沒去。第六天從後。皆不知我為誰。我亦不語言是佛。我復上梵天、梵眾天、梵輔天、大梵天、水行天、水微天、無量水天、水音天、約淨天、遍淨天、淨明天、守妙天、近際天、快見天、無結愛天。諸天皆來視我。我悉問：“若寧知經不？”中有知經者，有不知經者。我皆為說生死之道，說斷生死根本之道。子曹所樂經者，我皆為說之。我效作天上衣服語言。餘四天其天皆不能語。我欲上者，其天不能應答我。第二十五名空慧天，第二十六天名識慧入，第二十七天名無所念慧入，第二十八天名不想入。佛言：“吾無所不見。唯泥洹最為樂。” (T5, 1.166c16-127a15)

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